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ABSTRACT

In response to the shortage of qualified bilingual special education personnel to work with Limited English Proficient (LEP) special needs students, a program was developed in Vista Unified School District in North San Diego County, California, which involves training bilingual paraprofessionals to serve in special education settings. The paraprofessionals work with Spanish-speaking students who have primary language goals and objectives on their individualized education programs. Following a brief program description, a guide to the effective use of bilingual paraprofessionals in special education is provided, covering: advantages and disadvantages of using bilingual paraprofessionals; administrative planning options and support for use of bilingual paraprofessionals in special education; use of bilingual paraprofessionals in the classroom setting; training needs of special education certificated personnel in the use of bilingual paraprofessionals; and training needs of bilingual paraprofessionals in special education. (JDD)

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WHO WILL TEACH OUR CHILDREN?...
USE OF BILINGUAL PARAPROFESSIONALS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

By Patricia Flores Charter

In the best of all possible worlds only personnel with appropriate training and credentials would work with Limited English Proficient (LEP) special needs students. In reality this world simply does not exist. Instead we face a shortage of bilingual teachers for the regular bilingual programs (Calvillo-Craig, 1989) as well as a shortage of monolingual English speaking special education personnel across all categories (RISE, 1989). When we add "bilingual" to the special education job description we encounter a shortage at a crisis level. One American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) survey of membership found that less than 3.6% of their membership were ethnic minorities. Of these less than 1% identified themselves as able to assess and intervene in a language other than English. This continues to have an all encompassing effect on the ability of special education services to provide quality assessments and service options to our culturally and linguistically diverse populations. As a result one option being developed is the use of bilingual paraprofessionals.

The purpose of this paper is to one, describe a program developed in Vista Unified School District, a medium size district located in North San Diego County, California, to use bilingual paraprofessionals (also referred to as aides) in the special education setting in the absence of certificated bilingual special education personnel and two, provide a guide for planning and training for the effective use of bilingual paraprofessionals in special education. The specific areas addressed within this paper include:

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1. Background in using bilingual paraprofessionals including the advantages and disadvantages.
2. Administrative planning options and support for use of bilingual paraprofessionals in special education.

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3. Once you have bilingual paraprofessionals how they can be used.

4. Training needs of special education certificated personnel in the use of bilingual paraprofessionals.

5. Training needs of the bilingual paraprofessionals in special education.

Vista Program

In the spring of 1988 discussion and planning began for the use of bilingual paraprofessionals in lieu of unavailable bilingual certificated special education personnel in the areas of speech/language and learning disabilities. The content of the Vista paraprofessional program was based on a review of the literature, site visitations of bilingual special education programs, and classroom experience. In addition to development in this area, inservicing of both special education personnel and bilingual personnel was planned for the following school year in accordance with the "Bilingual Special Education Collaborative Model (Flores Charter, 1989). In September of 1988, the first full time bilingual paraprofessional was recruited to service only Spanish speaking students with primary language (L1) goals and objectives on their IEPs in the speech/language and/or RSP program at an elementary school with over 1000 students, 60% Hispanic, and a large bilingual program. By January of 1989 the positive impact of this service option on the students, bilingual staff, and parents lead to the hiring of another full time aide to service speech/language students with Spanish goals and objectives on their IEPs. This aide was itinerant and also served the speech/language preschool program. By January, 1990, formal training of bilingual special education aides included six full time aides; in August, 1990, five more aides entered training and servicing of students in Spanish.

Advantages

During the initial planning in Vista to increase service options to LEP special education students using bilingual paraprofessionals, the advantages and disadvantages of those options were reviewed. As any district considers this service option, the pros and cons must be addresssed. The advantages of using bilingual aides are many. The most important include:

1. Open up primary language service option in special education setting.
2. Can bring bilingual and special education programs together.
3. Can serve as a bridge to home, school and community.
4. Increase knowledge and sensitivity of special education personnel in the area of bilingual and/or migrant education and vice versa.
5. Serve as a role model.
6. Longevity on the job.

When the IEP multidisciplinary team decides that the goals and objectives for an LEP student be implemented in the LI, the next item to consider is who will implement these. Frequently in the past the responsiblity was with the already overtaxed bilingual teacher and/or the parent if a bilingual certificated special education instructor was not available. The introduction of the bilingual special education aide can become a new support option for the student's programs. This aide is frequently recruited from the bilingual or migrant education programs and thus often brings bilingual curricular as well as cultural knowledge to the program. Use of the bilingual aide for special education services provides an ideal setting for collaboration and communication between programs with this new liaison.

The aide can become a resource between home and school and community. The paraprofessional, using his/her linguistic and cultural background, can establish a positive relationship and bond between school and home that is critical to their student. At times the student and/or family need information and access to

community/health programs. The bilingual aide can expedite those needs and/or coordinate with migrant education, etc... to see that action is taken on all community/health issues.

As happens with many teachers, the aides frequently become role models with which the students can readily identify. As the students grow older, the possibility of disillusion with the system increases and so does the "at-risk" status. The intervention of the bilingual aide as a part of the whole support system could make "that difference" with the LEP student.

Finally, with better pay and benefits options, instructional special education paraprofessionals frequently bring stability and continuity to the job sites. This is a definite plus in the field of special education where turnover of certificated staff is not uncommon.

Disadvantages

In considering using bilingual aides in special education, each district must think through the obvious disadvantages of their use:

1. Money
2. Time
3. Paraprofessionals are not teachers/therapists.
4. Legal liabilities: The paraprofessionals should be properly monitored in all aspects of the job.

Depending on the L1 needs of special education students within a district, money can be the most obvious disadvantage. Cost can include district office level time to plan and oversee program, salaries/benefits of aides, and materials for special education instruction. At the same time it's important that a district make use of special education aides already in the system who also are bilingual. In addition, bilingual aides can be hired through natural attrition of personnel. The use of bilingual aides on an itinerant basis is a cost effective possibility.

Regarding material costs, it's important that materials and resources are shared between bilingual, special education, migrant education, chapter 1, etc... This includes commercial as well as teacher made supplies/units. These are just a few ideas that might assist in fiscal planning. What's important is that special education, migrant education, and bilingual education plan this through before and after implementation.

Time is always a problem. No one has any! As a result, planning, organization, and communication are critical to the successful use of a paraprofessional. One thing the special education specialist does not need is more work directly caused by poor planning, etc...

Paraprofessionals are not certificated and their lack of training and inexperience can make them a liability. This must be acknowledged clearly to all personnel who will be working with the aide. Training is the key. The quality of this training must be above reproach as the last major disadvantage to using a bilingual paraprofessional is the legal liability if the aides are not properly trained and supervised. The certificated teacher/therapist who oversees the L1 service by the aide is liable along with the district for the confidentiality and accuracy of content (testing, conferencing, instruction, etc...) in the program and this must be clear.

Administrative Planning Options and Support

In spite of the disadvantages previously noted in the use of bilingual paraprofessionals in special education, the advantages definitely outweigh them and point to the critical need to expand L1 service options when indicated for LEP special education students.

When considering implementation of this program, one must address the fact that the Bilingual Education Program continues to be a controversial one. Jim Cummins' book Empowering Minority Students

(1989) clearly defines this and addresses the overt opponents' challenges. Sometimes a more subtle, covert opposition exists within district special education personnel at both administrative and site levels. Because of this, careful administrative planning and an ongoing support structure must be in place.

Pre-planning between special education and bilingual administrators is critical. There are obviously many considerations prior to using bilingual aides in the special education setting. The following are listed in order of priority as administrators examine the feasibility of this option.

1. Administrative support from the TOP down. District guidelines are developed.
2. The size of linguistic minority populations. Does it warrant the program?
3. Projected growth of linguistic minority populations. Will planned expansion of the program be necessary?
4. Money.
5. Availability of qualified bilingual paraprofessionals within the area.
6. District bilingual program support of the use of bilingual paraprofessionals to service special education needs.

Once the district has committed to the use of bilingual aides in special education, the planning can begin in earnest. Whether or not this service option will succeed depends on the commitment and quality of administrative planning. This planning should include those costs mentioned previously including inservice costs. A district office level administrator is needed to oversee and enforce the district commitment and keep the program focused. The position of the bilingual special education aide is developed with a job description (keep in mind they must be fluent and literate in L1, as well as able to eventually lesson plan and develop materials). Training for certificated personnel and aides needs planning, and communication and public relations must be organized. Devise a method to keep communication open and ongoing between district office personnel, site level personnel, and between sites. Public relations refers to within

the district as well as the community. Make available all pertinent information to district personnel so they may understand and then support the program. Placement criteria for the program should be developed which can assist IEP teams with informed decision making and planning. Finally, in planning time frames, allow for the allocation of resources on an ongoing basis. Definitely plan for more time spent in the initial years of this program than for subsequent ones.

As districts implement the program it's important to organize follow-up procedures and monitor progress of the students linguistically, academically, and socially/emotionally in the program. The effectiveness of communication must be watched. Flexibility, a willingness to modify the program, must be maintained.

Now You've Got Them, When and How to Use Them!

Now that the decision has been made to use bilingual paraprofessionals to service special education students in their native language, the next issue is when and how to use these aides. This is a district, site, and individual issue. However, following are suggestions on the aide's roles based on positive outcomes in Vista Unified:

1. Use during conference/meetings to discuss student with parents.
2. Use during L1 testing for special education.
3. Parent contacts by phone, on home visits, etc...
4. Liaison with other site or district programs and personnel.
5. Instruction and/or therapy.
6. Development of bilingual special education materials.
7. District paperwork.

In discussing the use of any aide, **time management** becomes an issue. Anytime extra personnel are brought into a setting, there is an impact on time. For the RSP and SDC programs, use of an aide to facilitate the program is nothing new. However, for the speech/language specialist and/or psychologist, the adjustment of their time will be greater. All special education specialists will need to obtain a basic background in the district bilingual/ESL program. This information should be easily obtained through

district/county workshops, handbooks, and through site level personnel. Specific training needs of both the paraprofessional and certificated personnel will be addressed in the next section. An orientation period can assist in the transition of the aide to the special education setting before they actually service students. During this time the aide can be provided time to observe the basic special education program(s) he/she will be assisting. Time to discuss observations and plan and develop materials necessary to provide service is needed next. This period of time can last a few days to a couple of weeks. The special education specialist directly oversees this period. During this time the specialist will need to organize: testing, instruction and/or therapy goals and a schedule, materials development, paperwork, parent contacts, lesson planning time, and observations of the paraprofessional. These areas will always be the responsibility of the special education specialist to supervise.

Training of Special Education Certificated Personnel in the Use of Bilingual Paraprofessionals

Depending on the size of the program and time constraints, any number of formats can be utilized to train special education personnel in the use of bilingual paraprofessionals. This can take place **before** or **after** the aide is introduced to the setting. Pretraining is preferred, but not always possible. This training can be through central or site level inservices and/or through the dissemination of information through a handbook.

Any basic education program should be a dynamic process; bilingual special education is no exception. It is in its infancy, and thus new and important information in the field is surfacing continually. As a result, as one considers a **time frame** for training in this specific area, it would be wise to provide for the concept of

"ongoing training" to insure dissemination of all information as it becomes available. This can be yearly, included in a handbook, etc... It is important that the special education service provider gain information in the following areas:

1. Second language acquisition and problems unique to LEP students.
2. District bilingual/ESL program structure and curriculum.
3. Bilingual transition program.
4. District screening and referral process for LEP students.
5. LEP interventions prior to referral.
6. Assessment of LEP students.
7. Use of interpreters and translators in testing, conferencing, and instruction.
8. Writing linguistically appropriate IEP goals and objectives.
9. Instructional strategies/methodologies to use with bilingual special education students.
10. Bilingual materials and resources.

Tap all resources to assist in implementing these inservices. There will probably be some bilingual sponsored inservices and conferences which special education certificated and paraprofessionals can attend. Experience has shown that many of the "bilingual" instructional strategies are also appropriate for all our special education students. Thus much of the information gained can be generalized to the total population.

Training of Bilingual Special Education Paraprofessionals

Many of the same guidelines for certificated personnel training also apply to the bilingual paraprofessional. For example, the organization of the training will depend on the size of the program as well as the resources available within the district. One option is to inservice both the certificated and paraprofessional simultaneously when topics overlap. The format here, however, must be direct and formal training. A handbook as a resource specifically for the aide is highly recommended to reinforce the information, but not to use as a primary source of training. It will also serve as a tool for the certificated special education supervisor to understand what specifics were covered in the training.

Regarding the **time frame**, preservice is an excellent way to begin the training and orientation of the new aide. It is important to understand that the aides' needs are many. The sooner they receive formal/organized training, the better for all concerned. Whether one chooses several weeks of intensive training or periodic training, there is a need to structure periodic reviews to observe and implement the information.

The content of the training should be generic to all aides, irregardless of background. They need to start on "**common ground**". What is important is that they be exposed to formal and consistent background information necessary to function as an asset in the program. This exposure will need to be of a repetitive nature during the first year due to the quantity and complexity of information they are receiving. A handbook has been developed for bilingual aide formal training in the Vista program. The following are the sections from the handbook:

Section 1. Bilingual education program and other related catagoricals
Section 2. Special education background and bilingual special education information
Section 3. Alternative assessment information including interpreting and translating information
Section 4. Instructional strategies and methodologies with bilingual special education students
Section 5. Second Language Acquisition

Under the first section, the aides need background in the goals of bilingual education, the specific district organization, as well as an understanding of all services available (migrant education, chapter 1, etc...) to make use of and coordinate with these. Section two will give the paraprofessional background in the special education heirarchy of services as well as handicapping conditions and district programs. Here specific information on characteristics, eligibility and problems unique to LEP students is taught. Alternative assessment, the third section, gives a basic background in the aide's

role as interpreter/translator in the testing setting; covering issues such as confidentiality, validity and reliability in test administration, etc... The tests themselves are explained covering formal and informal with an opportunity to practice their administration. Under strategies, the topics can vary from specific programs (whole language, phonics, etc...) to multicultural curriculum, critical thinking, cognitive learning style, "at risk" characteristics, etc... Finally, an understanding of second language acquisition as well as instructional techniques (TPR, Natural Approach, Sheltered English, etc...) is covered. Once again tap all resources in implementing these inservices. Make use of all bilingual support available as stated in the previous section.

The use of bilingual paraprofessionals to service LEP special education students in their primary language has proven a viable service option in Vista Unified School District. The program has experienced both successes and setbacks. However, many problems can be avoided through the use of administrative planning, certificated and paraprofessional training, and effective communication at all levels between all programs involved.

The prospect of implementing an effective primary language service option for special education LEP students may seem beyond reach in an era of tight budgets and time frames. It is only overshadowed by the dire educational prognosis LEP special education students face without it. An "English only" program in special education is the equivalent of no option for LEP students. Until the availability of trained bilingual special education personnel improves, the use of bilingual paraprofessionals to provide primary language service options is an avenue open to us all.

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